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UNCLAS HARARE 001312

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SUBJECT: TRANSMISSION OF LETTER OF CONDOLENCE FROM H.E.  
PRESIDENT R.G. MUGABE TO PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

1. (U) Embassy Harare is in receipt of a dip note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Zimbabwe forwarding a condolence message from H.E. President R.G. Mugabe to President George W. Bush and the bereaved families affected by Hurricane Katrina. Embassy will forward the note and condolence message by pouch to the Department.

2. (U) (BEGIN TEXT)

Your Excellency,  
It was with profound shock that we learnt of the havoc caused by Hurricane Katrina, the destructive storm which swept through the Gulf Coast states of your country recently, resulting in a sad loss of human life and extensive damage to property.

On behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Zimbabwe and on my own behalf, I wish to convey our deep sympathy and sincere condolences to you, Your Excellency, and through you, to the bereaved families and to the Government and people of the United States of America, in this very difficult hour.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,  
R.G. Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe  
(END TEXT)

3. (U) Comment: Mugabe's condolences ring disingenuous. Speaking in the General Debate at the United Nations General Assembly on September 17, Mugabe accused the U.S. of hypocritically condemning him for demolishing urban slums while neglecting our own homeless black victims of the hurricane. Playing the well-practiced race card before the Assembly he said, "a whole community of mainly non-whites was deliberately abandoned to the ravages of Hurricane Katrina as sacrificial lambs."

4. (U) Comment cont'd: The devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina has struck a chord with Zimbabweans. Despite Mugabe's rhetoric, many messages in the independent press focus on the suffering of US citizens and commend the USG for its disaster relief efforts. Some commentators have gone so far as to use USG efforts as a point of comparison to turn the criticism back on Mugabe's Operation Restore Order. For example, Ralph Black, Director of Communications for the Association of Zimbabweans Based Abroad, writing for SW Radio Africa on September 19, commented that the USG had responded with compassion to the suffering and had engaged the military in saving lives, while the Zimbabwean military had been involved in the destruction of dwellings and businesses. To add insult to injury, he commented, the Zimbabwean government was actively preventing humanitarian assistance from reaching the affected. End comment.

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